

for Weisberg
8 Jan 1970

Howard Roffman
Philadelphia

Howard:

I have your letter re Specter interview and other mail, but must answer hastily. Please excuse.

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Specter interview: Do not by any means be disappointed by failure to get all that you wanted, for other things may come out of it more valuable than you think. From what is disclosed in your letter I see nothing that you did wrong under such trying circumstances. It's good that S should understand that we know far more than he thinks we know; that will trouble him, and the more troubled he is, the better it is for all. I find it difficult to believe that he is absolutely bereft of conscience; that may eventually turn him. Also there is the instinct of self-preservation which might drive him our way. In any case, I think it far better for him to know that he is cornered than that he should move in comfort. The worst that can happen is that such as Specter and others should become bored with the issue. If you did nothing else, you at least jogged his 'interest', and that is worth gold. Think of what Garrison's failure to get the autopsy material produced for us: the Panel Report and a judicial decision that the autopsy was deficient. Every time they push the panic button we benefit. There's a time to go easy and a time to go hard. ~~xxx~~ What you did and what you got seems just right to me-- at least in so far as it is much more than others might have managed.

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Congratulations, too, on your self-control. I am not sure whether I could have maintained it. The "I don't know" about Finck's N.O. testimony was grand.

I think if you had gotten a tape of the interview, I would have been disappointed that you didn't also get a movie of Specter in action. I envy you.

Perhaps you understand now why I raise my ~~xxx~~ eyebrows at knowledge that Specter waxed Thompson in his debate-- or even that Specter agreed to debate Thompson. I find it hard to believe that he would agree to debate unless he knew beforehand that he was going to win.

Helpern's remarks: Information about "deer rifle" is insufficient for the reasons that you mention. If indeed the equipment was such as the shooter normally used on deer, then he used a soft-nosed mushrooming bullet that could have an explosive effect on a human skull. Many factors come into play, and definite determination is not possible without more info than Helpern gives.

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Phila. medical examiners: Go easy, especially at first, and learn how much criticism of autopsy docs they can take without rushing to their defense. I would give this advice even if they were not acquainted with Finck and the others-- the more so since they are. MDs protect each other almost by instinct. It's best to disclose informations and let them come to conclusions. If they are inclined to be co-operative and not care where the chips fall, then you can probe further. First find out what they are like, then determine how far you can go. By my own experience, often to my eventual disappointment (and something experienced by others), I know that there is a terrible urge to show how much you know. If you have that feeling-- and you do, if you are like

me-- by all means resist it. You'll sense it when suddenly you realize that you are lecturing to the person whom you are supposed to be interviewing. I succumb to this often, and it's bad news for anybody who wants to get information. On many occasions I have cheated myself out of things I wanted to know-- mostly because I was more interested in showing persons what I knew than in learning what they knew.

I mention this affliction of mine in the hope that you won't allow it to become yours.

Lung bruises: I do not understand what is behind this remark in your 22 Dec letter to Harold: "Morgan's letter now shows us what caused that bruise-- it was the fragments that they observed there (in the neck)". How does ~~this~~ Morgan's letter show this? If you refer to the A-P X-ray view of the fragments, I don't see how it bears. The A-P view cannot show the degree of penetration of these fragments, though that is importnat to know

That bruise interests me, for reasons which I believe I explained in a previous letter.

Bunching of JFK coat: I do not regard the matter very important, and won't engage in argument over it. The picture in Curry's book does not "prove" that JFK's coat was bunched when he was on Elm St.; it does, however, indicate the probability that it was bunched on Elm.

But you can't get it any more. It's not in the book.

Shots from TSHD window: I don't assert the impossibility of ~~any~~ some shooting originating from here. I would argue against the possibility of an M-C rifle firing as many as three shots from here: one shot, maybe; two shots, very unlikely; three shots, impossible. Reasons are essentially what you suggest: the set-up of boxes, half-open window, and other topographical features get in the shooter's way.

I can't refute the witnesses who said they saw rifle and/or shooting from this window, so I tend to think that one shot may have originated from here.

The full explanation requires demonstration of how you have to move in that set-up, and I don't have time to go over it.

Impossible to fire any shots toward Elm through the area to the right of the boxes-- there is no view of Elm through that side, except directly in front of the window; no angular view.

Behind fence in Willis and Betzner: I'll have to check your observations more carefully than I have. Offhand, however, I would say that even if you have correctly interpreted the pictures, there is not enough to make a case. It's the sort of thing you sit on, and keep in the back of your head until you can corroborate or refute it.

Location of JFK back wounds: Kellerman, Greer, Hill do not give definite designations and can do no more than indicate that there is confusion in an area where there ought not to be any.

1 don't think that the present state of info allows definite determination.

Besides, I do not think that knowledge of the location is as important as other facts.

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Book by "English doctor": Forensic Medicine: .303 caliber can pulp brain and smash cranium-- even the military rounds. Much depends on the on-target velocity and other things. It is a much faster bullet than 6.5mm M-C, ~~which is~~ above 2500 feet per sec. muzzle velocity, I think.

What "English doctor" says about bullet disintegration at ranges less than 300 yards is pure crap-- if, as I suppose, he refers to military rounds. Doctor is a quack in this regard. If a military round does not strike bone, it does not fragment. If a military bullet strikes bone, and if the on-target velocity is high, then it might break up by separating from the jacket and dispersing in several relatively large chunks, with perhaps some very small fragments.

The 1895 article refers to the type of bullet represented by such as 399. Before the development of jacketed bullets, bullets were lead or lead alloy. The jackets held the lead together and let it pass into body without producing excessive peripheral damage; more "humane" wounds result.

To understand the difference you've got to see the wounds that different bullets produce at various ranges. Recently I saw the pelt of a wolf that had been hit by a .270 hollow point in the shoulder. The hole was so big that you could stick your head through it-- literally. That .270 slug disintegrated on the shoulder and did not penetrate far into the animal; the other side of the pelt was intact.

Varminting bullets: the 48 gr bullet fired at 4500 fps probably is the caliber known as .220 Swift. It's the fastest hunting caliber that there is. Used almost exclusively for varmints, tho some foolishly use them on deer-- they are not designed for deer.

Eliminating ricochet is a peripheral advantage of the high velocity varminters; that is not the reason why they are designed that way. They are designed to kill small animals instantly without regard for the preservation of the animal's flesh or pelt. Since these animals are not hunted for food, hunter wants an instant kill to ~~be certain~~ be certain. Hunters who want to eat game try to use ammo that does not destroy much meat. The fact that varminters seldom ricochet is a gratifying side effect, but not the reason why these are so designed.

I have other correspondence to get to, and a bad day of classes to prepare for tomorrow.. So long.

Still,

cc Weisberg